

October 29, 2003

Duxbury Clipper

## A Line in the Sand on Beach Access

By KEITH L. MARTIN

There was a clear line in the sand between the nearly two dozen residents and non-residents at Wednesday's public meeting to discuss access to Duxbury Beach.

While residents said they wanted fewer non-residents on the beach, those from out of town made their case that overcrowding was the main issue, not who had more right



**Nearly two dozen citizens and non-citizens were on hand for a debate over beach access Wednesday night at Town Hall.**

to the beach.

Wednesday's meeting at Town Hall was sponsored by the Beach Committee at the request of Duxbury Selectmen who wanted a better pulse on how the public felt about access to the part of the beach leased by the town, including the number and cost of access stickers for non-resident, off-road vehicles.

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The meeting began with a presentation by the committee on Duxbury Beach stakeholders, including the Duxbury Beach Reservation. Formed in 1975, the charitable trust owns the beach and leases it to Duxbury, using income to maintain and improve dunes and protect endangered species.

Currently, the town allows 500 vehicles onto the beach at a time, maintaining a ratio of 250 residents to 250 non-residents at a time. This sets up situations, for example, where 250 residents can be on the beach along with 200 non-residents, yet those from Duxbury are turned away until vehicle space is freed up by a fellow resident.

According to Jake Emerson of the Harbormaster's Office, last year residents were turned away for a total of three hours while non-residents were turned away for a total of 28 hours.

Despite this, some Duxbury residents called for a renewed look at the 250/250 ratio with some feeling it was their taxes footing the bill to fund the majority of beach operations.

Beach Committee member Kay Foster corrected this misconception, explaining that the sale of stickers pay for beach support from the Harbormaster, Duxbury Police and other services. Furthermore, she said, since non-residents pay twice as much per season, they were contributing more to these services.

Quoting numbers from the treasurer's office, Foster said as of September 3, 2003, resident lot and over-sand stickers produced \$380,030 while non-resident over-sand stickers brought in \$629,610.

Non-residents in attendance, like Paul McGovern of Hanson, said that, given these numbers, disallowing out-of-towners would end up hurting Duxbury financially.

"Even if you ban non-residents, you are not going to solve the overcrowding problem because you'll still allow 500 vehicles at the beach," said McGovern, who said he's come to the beach for 23 years. "So [by lowering the number of non-residents] you will actually be shooting yourself in the foot financially and throwing away over half of your money."

Committee member Tom Gill, representing the Conservation Commission, said that the money raised from non-residents is important and significant to the finances used to run the



beach, so there has to be a balance between the two sides on what to do to make the beach experience more enjoyable for all.

Gil also expressed the desire to look at the 500-vehicle number, given the fact that vehicles on the sand today are much larger than those years ago when the number was set.

Discussion then turned to alternative ways of issuing stickers, including McGovern's suggestion of beachgoers paying by the day instead of by season. Many Duxbury residents still encouraged the Beach Committee to reduce the number of non-resident stickers and revamp the ratio to favor those who live in town.

"If you give 490 stickers to Duxbury residents and 10 to non-residents, the 491st resident is still not able to get on," said Gill. "There is no way to guarantee access to all Duxbury residents or all non-residents. No matter what the decision is [regarding fees or changing the ratio], it will exclude people."

Committee member Dan Baker recommended that since the overcrowding is worst on the weekend, perhaps the ratio could be favorable for residents then and stay 250/250 during the week.

"Why are you favoring residents?" asked McGovern, reminding them that the Duxbury Beach Reservation's mission statement states the beach should be operated "for the benefit of the people of Duxbury and the general public."

"Because I'm a resident I think is the honest answer," said Baker. "Why not?"

Linda Robinson of

Duxbury said the town should at least try perhaps a 350 resident/150 non-resident split for a couple of years to see if the overcrowding decreases instead of simply debating it, which isn't doing anything to change the situation.

Selectman Andre Martecchini said that in attending work group meetings with the Duxbury Bay Management Committee on preserving the bay, one idea his group was thinking about was satellite parking for Duxbury Beach, perhaps with parking at Duxbury High School and a shuttle to and from the beach. Both residents and non-residents were lukewarm to the idea, with some saying that would invite even more people to come to the beach.

The presence of the piping plover also made its way into the discussion, with Emerson describing how the decisions are made to close parts of the beach when the plover's environment is threatened.

Many in attendance, including Dave Cole from Kingston, felt the town was doing a great wildlife service and should be commended.

"Duxbury is unique in that it has monitors for the plovers and maintains a delicate balance, so the harbormaster's staff deserves credit for doing that," he said.

At the conclusion of the meeting, Beach Committee Chairman Joe Conway said that his group would take all of the public's suggestions to mind and discuss them at their subsequent meetings and in the coming months with Selectmen.